

## **6-8-2011 Senate Economic Budget Subcommittee Presentation: UWMC**

Good afternoon, my name is Kathryn Schippers and I am representing United Way of Mahaska County. I am our Iowa Career Access Point Site Coordinator as well as our marketing and promotions department, creator and manager of our county's only comprehensive resource directory, our organization's representative at our local Chamber of Commerce, website manager, and coordinator of our summer backpack program, Operation Backpack, all part-time.

Our United Way office is located in a building that also houses the local offices of four other non-profit agencies. When we applied for funding from Strengthen Rural Iowa to open our ICAP site, the thinking was that we could provide clients who were already in our building seeking services at one of the agencies with the convenience of also being able to access job search tools, or report their unemployment status for the week. Since our community has an Iowa Workforce Development Center across town, we only ever intended to function as an extension of and compliment to their services.

Our site is open 10 hours a week. The training that I received as the site coordinator was a 2 hour presentation provided by Workforce Development, on my first day of employment. My role is to help clients access the internet to use Workforce Development's website, or to set up an email address, research interviewing techniques, or help them format their resumes. The site has been underutilized by the community. We believe this is due to clients' familiarity with the staff at our Workforce Center.

There are two main reasons Mahaska County cannot face the closure of our Workforce Center. Firstly, according to our most recent Human Services Community Needs Assessment,

completed in 2008, our county's lack of public transportation—in any form—is one of the greatest barriers to our residents. Since United Way also functions in communities as a referral source, I can say first-hand that transportation needs top the list of issues we receive requests from clients to help resolve. If our Workforce Office is closed, the residents of our county who struggle with a lack of transportation will not be able to travel to Ottumwa or Des Moines to visit an alternative office. Additionally, the most recent Laborshed Survey and Analysis conducted of Mahaska County found that 57.1% of our unemployed workforce seeking employment looks to Workforce Development to secure employment. How many of those individuals would we have to tell, “Sorry, but you’ll have to go another town, even though you don’t have a way to get there?”

Secondly, United Way of Mahaska County does not have the capacity or the intention as the host of an ICAP site to fill the void that the closure of our Workforce Office would create. We do not have the funding, the training, or the man hours to devote to providing a substitution for the real thing. Currently, with the departure of our executive director, we have only three part-time employees: one works from home in data entry, one is our accountant, the last is, of course, myself. Our hours combined equate approximately to 1.25 staff. We already wish for a day long enough to get done everything that needs doing. If more of our time was devoted to providing ICAP services, our organization and the community would suffer due to our inattention to our other responsibilities. Finally, our one year ICAP Memorandum of Understanding with Iowa Workforce Development expires on July 26<sup>th</sup>. Our board has expressed the intention of ending ICAP services at that time. No other organization in our county has applied to host the ICAP site after we are released from our obligation.

In closing, when it was rumored in April that our Workforce Office might be one of the offices no longer maintained by the state, a flurry of activity began: petitions were circulated and filled up, urgent letters were written and sent. This is a community that values its Workforce Office and looks to it for guidance on the path to financial stability. We have no alternative way to provide the same services and no public way of transporting individuals to a site outside our community. If our local Workforce Center is closed, those who need their services most in Mahaska County will be completely without.

Thank you.